

Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument

NEWSLETTER



Issue #4

October 2004

The Manager's Message

It has been quite some time since our last update on the progress of the resource management plan (RMP) for the monument. The plan is continuing to evolve.

It was our intention to have a draft RMP out for your review this past summer, but as many of you know, we are now going to take a look at 12 existing natural gas leases located within the monument.

Our decision to examine these leases is the result of a District Court ruling in favor of a lawsuit alleging the BLM did not fully comply with the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act and the National Historic Preservation Act when we awarded three of these leases in 1999.

These leases were based on the West HiLine RMP (1988). In light of the court's ruling, we now feel all 12 of the leases should be analyzed in the monument RMP. Unfortunately, this decision will delay the draft until spring/summer of 2005.

We are again asking for your help on the oil/gas leasing issue, and have scheduled six public meetings to begin crafting a range of alternatives for determining the resource stipulations necessary to

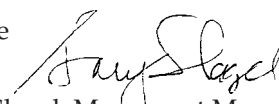
protect the area under lease and the values for which the monument was designated.

Another issue you may have heard about through the media concerns the map for the monument. As a result of a meeting between Secretary of the Interior Norton, Congressman Rehberg, and several residents of north-central Montana, the boundary line outlining the monument has been removed.

I want to assure you removal of the boundary line in no way reduces the monument public land acreage, affects our preparation of the RMP, or impacts any management alternatives we are analyzing. As we have said many times in the past, the monument consists only of BLM public land; we do not manage state or private land.

All of us at BLM continue to appreciate and value your participation in this process. Preparation of an RMP can be a lengthy and time consuming process, and I encourage you to stay involved. We really do want your input and appreciate your willingness to participate.

Sincere


Gary Slagel, Monument Manager

Bureau of Land Management
P.O. Box 1160, Airport Road



Lewistown Field Office
Lewistown, Montana 59457

MEETING SCHEDULE

We'll be hosting six public meetings around north central Montana in November to solicit your comments.

The focus of each meeting will be to invite your help in creating a range of alternatives and stipulations for these 12 leases what will protect the values for which this Monument was designated.

The meeting dates and locations are:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Community</i>	<i>Location</i>
11/8	Winifred	Community Hall Main Street
11/9	Lewistown	BLM Office Airport Road
11/10	Great Falls	BLM/USFS Office 1101 15 th St. North
11/15	Chinook	Chinook Motor Inn 100 Indiana Street
11/16	Fort Belknap	Little River Learning Lodge Blackfeet St.
11/17	Billings	Holiday Inn Grand 5500 Midland Road

MEETING FORMAT

Each public meeting will run from 7 to 9 p.m. and the format for each meeting will be the same.

We'll have four information stations at each meeting. These stations will provide information about the 12 leases we'll analyze, the wildlife values in the area, the cultural resources in the area and the recreational opportunities these BLM lands provide.

We'll also have informational handouts to help answer questions and photo displays of the lease areas to help attendees visualize the landscape.

Each meeting will flow like this:

7:00 p.m.	Sign-in and opportunity to visit the four information stations
7:15	Welcome by Gary Slagel, Monument Manager, and overview
7:30	Resource presentations by BLM specialists
8:00	Opportunity to visit the four information stations for further information
8:20	Facilitated question/answer session
9:00	Closing statement by Gary Slagel

HOW TO SUBMIT COMMENTS

The BLM hopes these public meetings will provide the information and answers necessary to help the public submit written comments (either at the conclusion of each meeting or at a later date).

Your comments will be most useful if received by December 15, 2004. However, we want to ensure everyone that we consider public involvement an important part of the planning process and we will accept comments anytime prior to releasing the draft RMP/EIS. We will work hard to include your substantive comments.

If you can not attend one of these meetings, there are other means of submitting your comments and participating in this process. The informational handouts and photo displays used during these meetings will be available on our web site following the meetings. You can mail your written comments to us (at Bureau of Land Management, Lewistown Field Office, P.O. Box 1160, Lewistown, MT 59457) or you can e-mail your comment to us at monumentrmp@blm.gov. For e-mail comments, please include a complete name and mailing address. For additional information, please visit our web site at www.mt.blm.gov/ldo/um/MonumentRMP.

WHAT TYPE OF COMMENTS ARE MOST USEFUL

Substantive comments that help us define a range of alternatives and stipulations to protect the resources and values within this Monument will be most helpful. Those comments that discuss specific values are most likely to help shape specific alternatives that will apply to the area covered by the 12 leases.

YOUR COMMENTS ARE PUBLIC – UNLESS

All comments concerning this resource management plan and the names and addresses of those individuals who submit them are considered public information and by law, must be released if someone requests them. However, an individual may request his or her name and address not be released to the public. This request must be in writing and included with all comments submitted.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. Why is the BLM scoping this issue now? Why wasn't this done in 2002 concurrent with the initial RMP scoping effort?

A. When we analyzed the management situation for the lands included in the Monument, we believed previous environmental documentation, namely the 1988 West HiLine RMP and supporting documents, had adequately covered oil and gas leasing in the area. In addition, the Monument proclamation precluded any new leasing and directed BLM to manage development on existing leases in the Monument subject to valid existing rights. Under those circumstances, doing another analysis of this issue did not seem reasonable or a wise use of tax dollars and staff time.

However, a March 31, 2004, preliminary ruling by the Montana Federal District Court ordered us to prepare a new environmental impact statement addressing three West HiLine leases. We believe the most efficient way to address the court's concerns is to include an analysis of these 12 leases in the new Monument RMP.

Q. Are the three leases involved in Court's preliminary ruling the only leases in the Monument issued under the West HiLine RMP?

A. No, there are 12 leases in the Monument issued under the West HiLine RMP.

Q. How much will this delay the release of the draft RMP?

A. We estimate that the RMP schedule will be extended from 9 to 12 months.

Q. Are there more than 12 leases based on the West HiLine RMP, and if so, why aren't you analyzing those leases as well?

A. A number of other leases outside the Monument were issued under the West HiLine RMP. These will be analyzed in future, scheduled planning efforts that will address BLM lands outside the Monument.

Q. Are there any wells (either dry or producing) on these 12 leases?

A. Yes. Two wells have been drilled on two of the leases. Both were dry holes. None of the 12 leases involve a producing well.

Q. How many acres are covered by these 12 leases? What is the total acreage leased for oil and gas within the Monument?

A. The 12 leases cover 10,034 acres in the Monument. However, some of the leases include minerals outside the Monument, and as a result, the total acreage of the 12 leases is 12,782 acres.

The total acreage covered by all oil and gas leases in the Monument is 41,743 acres. This includes the 10,034 acres contained in the 12 West HiLine leases and acreage from another 31 leases issued under previous planning documents.

Q. If these leases are valid, what do you intend to accomplish with this analysis?

A. This analysis will allow us to take a fresh look at the area covered by the 12 leases and the stipulations necessary to adequately protect the values for which the Monument was created. If additional protection is needed, we may add or modify the existing stipulations.

Q. If these leases were initially analyzed with an inadequate environmental document, are they really valid?

A. We believe lease validity in this case would be an issue for the Court to decide. The March preliminary ruling did not contain an order rescinding the leases.

Q. Could you reissue the leases if they were nullified?

A. The Monument proclamation allows existing leases to be developed but prohibits new leasing.

PLANNING SCHEDULE

Including an analysis of these 12 natural gas leases will delay the release of the draft RMP/EIS by at least 9 months. We now anticipate releasing the draft sometime during the summer of 2005.

Your name will remain on our mailing list unless you want it removed. If you want it removed, please print your name and address clearly below and return this entire page to:

MONUMENT MANAGER
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
LEWISTOWN FIELD OFFICE
PO BOX 1160
AIRPORT ROAD
LEWISTOWN, MT 59457

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